So far telephone facility has been provided in 900 villages including some Gram Sabhas. Remaining villages will be covered progressively by March, 2002.

Telephone Exchanges with STD facility in Gujarat

†3852. SHRI BACHANI LEKHRAJ : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) the number of Taluka or Tehsil Headquarters having telephone exchanges with STD facility in Gujarat till the year 1999;

(b) the number of Talukas in the State where this facility is not yet available and the details in this regard; and

(c) by when the STD facility is likely to be provided in such Taluka headquarters ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR) : (a) Out of 223 Taluka Headquarters in Gujarat, 219 Taluka Headquarters were having Telephone Exchanges with STD facility till the year 1999.

(b) and (c) As on 31-3-2000 there are 226 Taluka Headquarters out of which 225 are having STD facility. Remaining one *i. e.* Kaparada Taluka, is not having any Telephone exchange. It has been planned to install telephone exchange with STD facility there during this year.

Charging of high rents for telephones

3853. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are charging high rents for telephones ;

(b) whether it is also a fact that efficiencies of technology are not being passed on to the telephone subscriber;

(c) whether any effort is being made to reduce costs of operation in the telecom system;

(d) if so, what innovative measures have been taken to reduce costs of operation in the telecom sector; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(e) by when the gains from such efficient operations would be passed on to consumers in the form of lower rents and lower service charges ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR) : (a) No, Sir.

The power of tariff fixation for various telecom services has been entrusted to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India by virtue of Sec 11(2) of the TRAI Act, 1997. Accordingly the Authority had notified Telecom Tariff Order 1999 on 15-03-99 which *inter-alia* provided for increase in rentals ranging from 20% to 140%. The Department of Telecom Services, as one of the service providers, has, however, not increased rentals in respect of rural subscribers and low calling urban subscribers (those making up to 200 calls p. m.). Even for other high calling subscribers TRAI's study shows that rental notified by them is below the cost.

(b) No, Sir.

The benefit of induction of new technologies as a result of which efficiency improves and costs come down goes to the customer in the form of tariff reduction as it is evident from reduction in long distance (STD) rates by around 20% from 1-5-99.

(c) and (d) The state-of-art technology and computerization is being constantly introduced in the telecom network to reduce cost of operation. Many innovative measures like massive expansion of optical fiber network and digital electronic exchanges etc. have been taken in this regard.

(e) As clarified in reply to part (a) and (b) above, gains from efficient operation are passed on to the consumers.

Poor performance of Karkardooma Telephone Exchange

3854. SHRI SURYABHAN PATIL VAHADANE : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether despite tall claims of prompt and efficient services by MTNL customer services and fault repair system under Karkardooma Telephone Exchange are in shambles and customers have to run from pillar to post for even petty services like activation/reactivation of STD/ISD facilities, call transfer system, CID systems etc;